

Rep. John Ahern

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Local Government,
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Rep. John Ahern

6th Legislative District

2006 Session Review

Dear Friends,

I appreciate the opportunity to serve as your representative in Olympia.

The biggest news for me this session was the passage of my felony DUI bill. After six years of working on this, I was finally able to get it to the governor's desk. It was a very rocky path and sometimes I thought the bill was dead, but I persevered and worked for a bipartisan agreement. The bill finally was passed by both chambers on the last day of session.

House Bill 3317 makes it a class C felony to get five DUIs in ten years. The law goes into effect in July of 2007. While this law isn't as tough as I wanted, I'm just glad to have a felony DUI law on the books and feel good that this state is no longer one of only three states that didn't have such a law.

The other big news out of Olympia this session is the supplemental operating budget passed by the majority that is the largest spending increase in state history. The Democrat-controlled House presented a budget that was a 17.4 percent increase over the previous biennium. Of that, \$425 million was NEW spending. I'll give you more details on the budget inside.

I'm sure that I'll see many of you around the district this spring and summer, and I encourage you to contact me with your thoughts about what went on in Olympia this session.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "John E. Ahern".

Rep. John Ahern

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- **Toll-free Legislative Hotline:** 1-800-562-6000
 - **TTY (Hearing-impaired Hotline):** 1-800-635-9993
 - **Legislative Information on the Internet:** www.leg.wa.gov
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• News from Rep. Ahern •

Finally, a tougher DUI law for our state

It took six years and a lot of knocking on doors during session, but I was finally able to get my felony DUI bill passed this year. Although, it's not as tough as I wanted.

Originally, I started out with three DUIs in seven years being a felony. This session I had to change the bill to get support from the majority side as they were concerned with the cost of putting habitual drunk drivers in prison. So I went from my original proposal to four DUIs in seven years. Then, I changed it again to five DUIs in seven years so that the majority could keep the bill moving. Once the bill passed the House, I had to change it again to five DUIs in ten years in order to get it out

of the Senate and the law couldn't go into effect until July of 2007. This final version (House Bill 3317) is the one the governor signed into law.

I'm telling you about all the versions of my bill to let you know what it takes to get a law passed in Olympia. The important thing is that we've got a felony DUI law on the books.



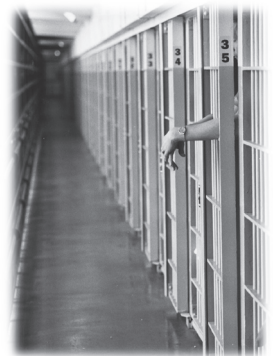
I plan to go back next session and try to toughen it to the terms of my original bill two years ago.

My incentive for working so hard on this bill was all the letters, e-mails, and phone calls I received from victims and families of victims of drunk drivers. I wasn't going to rest until we could begin putting some of these habitual drunk drivers behind bars. I'm hoping that this law will also serve as a deterrent to those drunks out there who are close to getting their fifth DUI and make them think twice about getting behind the wheel.

Getting tough on sex offenders

I joined with the House and Senate Republicans this session to try and pass "Jessica's Law Plus." This bill would have imposed life sentences on some of the worst sex offenders and required GPS monitoring of those sex offenders who were released into the community. House Bill 2476 was killed by the majority in favor of their own bill House Bill 3277.

The Democrat-sponsored HB 3277 was a watered down version of our Jessica's Law and does not get tough enough. The majority's bill includes broad exemp-



Rep Ahern lobbied lawmakers and even the governor to get his Felony DUI bill passed this year.

• News from Rep. Ahern •

tions for those related to their victims and gives too much discretion to prosecutors. I finally voted for the bill because it does strengthen penalties against most sex offenders. I'd rather have half a loaf, then no bread at all. I'll continue to work next session to further toughen penalties for sex offenders.

Getting tough on meth and meth makers

I supported Senate Bill 6239 that is one of the most sweeping reforms of controlled-substance law in quite some time. This was a bipartisan effort and came to the Legislature recommended by state Attorney General Rob McKenna.

This bill not only toughens penalties for meth makers but also includes treatment options for meth users who are imprisoned as a result of this bill going into law. The bill also includes pilot programs to study clean-up funding for contaminated sites.

As we all know, having a meth lab in our neighborhood can be a nuisance and a danger to our children. I support any legislation that takes on the problem of this insidious drug and provides some relief to local authorities who have to deal with the problem head-on. This bill was a welcome start to dealing with this all-too-common problem in our neighborhoods.



Uncontrolled spending

The Democrat-controlled House submitted a state operating budget that included appropriations of \$1.3 billion dollars from the general fund. Of this amount, \$425 million was new spending.

All this spending is occurring in a supplemental budget year. Supplemental budgets are to make minor



adjustments to the biennial budget and to cover expenses not anticipated in the original budget (drawn up in 2005). Instead, the majority brought this largest spending increase in state history up to a vote in a short-session year.

I voted against this budget because it increased state spending by over 17 percent from the last budget cycle. The majority is spending most of the surplus state revenue, now projected at \$1.6 billion, by the end of 2007. I couldn't sit quietly and spend our state's revenue away, setting us up for tax increases in the future.

We need to save our state's money

I worked hard this session to try and set up a constitutional rainy-day fund. I wanted to save our projected \$1.6 billion in extra state revenue for any possible downturns in our economy that may be ahead.

The majority didn't save enough money. The bill I supported that would create a rainy-day fund never made it out of committee. I have talked to budget experts and they predict that spending like this can't be sustained in the years ahead. What will happen when this extra \$1.6 billion is spent?

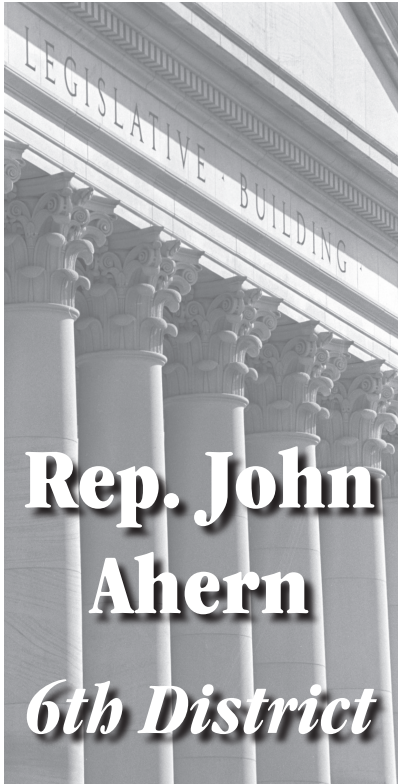


I predict that the majority will have to raise taxes in order to pay for their programs down the road. Another bill I supported would have mandated a two-thirds majority of each legislative chamber in order to raise your taxes. This bill also never made it out of committee. We've seen what happens to state budgets when the Democrat-controlled committees are in charge—they spend beyond our means.

I believe the state should save its extra money and prepare for future budget deficits should the economy go into a down cycle again. This session would have been a great time to create a permanent "rainy day" fund — a provision to the state constitution that would require lawmakers to put a percentage of money away every budget cycle to protect the state during tough economic times. Yet, this legislation was not allowed a vote.

Representative John Ahern

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Small business assistance

I worked this session to remove the regulatory burdens that prevent the growth of small businesses. I had two goals this year: to repeal the death tax and to reform unemployment insurance (UI). One was a success and one was not successful.

I supported House Bill 3306 that would repeal the tax on the estates of successful businesspeople. I consider the death tax to be an unnecessary burden on people when they're dealing with a death in the family and believe it unfairly penalizes the heirs of small business owners. Unfortunately, this bill was not allowed for a vote and died at a cutoff date during session.



There was a bipartisan effort to reform UI, and I voted in favor of Senate Bill 6885 that creates stability in UI insurance rates and protects benefits from changes down the road. I believe this new law, that takes effect in June, will be a help to small business owners.

It's important to keep our 6th District economy growing by fostering the well-being of small businesses in our community. Any help I can give through eliminating regulations or improving programs can only fuel the engine of our growing economy.

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